

# MEMORIAL

OF THE

*Farmers, Manufacturers, Mechanics, and Merchants,*

OF THE

COUNTY OF RENSSELAER,

IN THE

STATE OF NEW YORK,

PRAYING FOR A REVISION OF THE TARIFF.

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JANUARY 26, 1824.

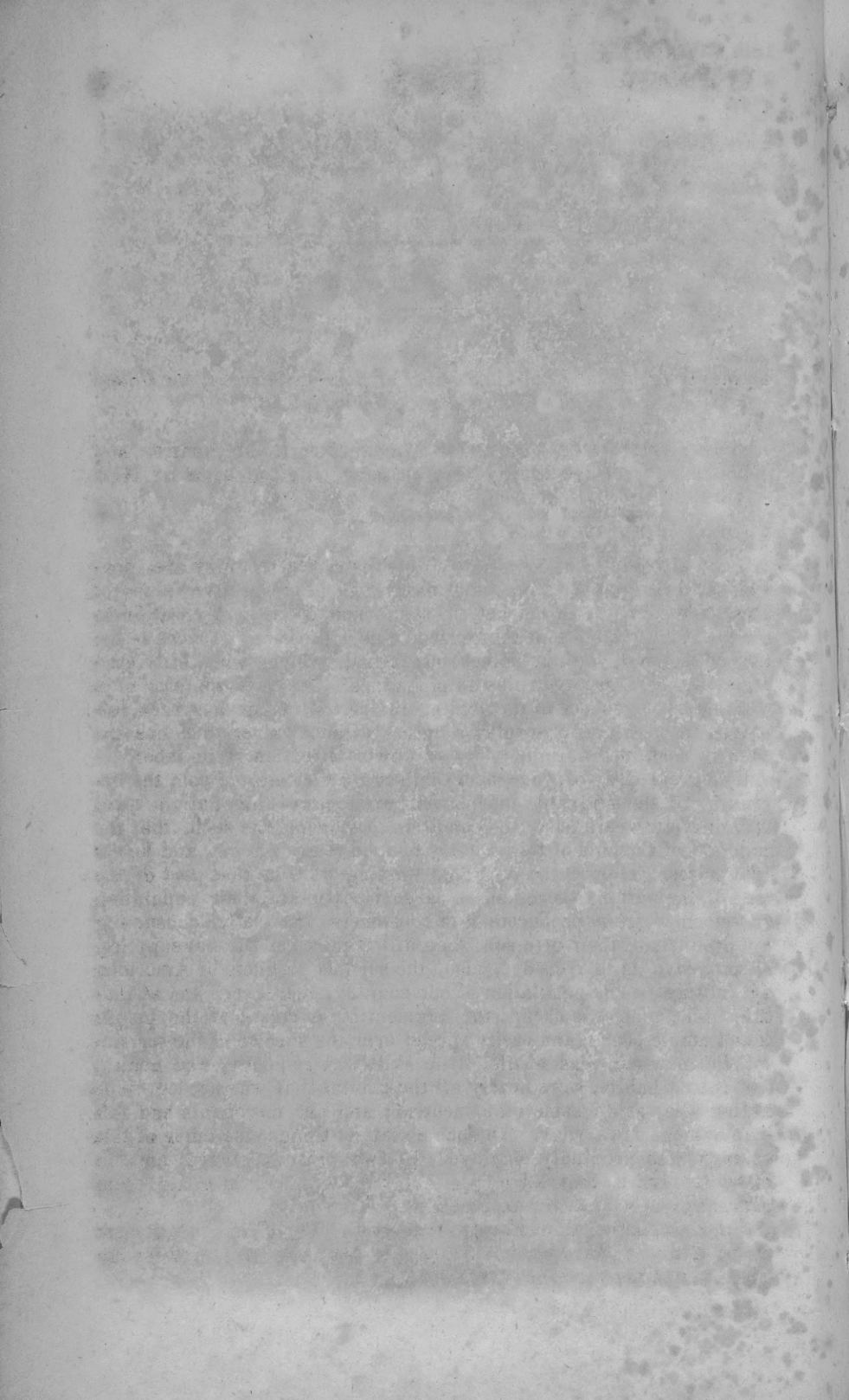
Read, and referred to the committee of the whole House on the State of the Union to which is referred the "Bill to amend the several acts for imposing Duties on Imports."

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1824.



## MEMORIAL.

*To the Honorable the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States, in Congress assembled,*

The Memorial of the Farmers, Manufacturers, Mechanics, and Merchants, of the county of Rensselaer, in the state of New York,

## RESPECTFULLY SHEWETH :

That the staple commodities of this district of country are, provisions, bread-stuffs, wool, and flax: that the respective values of these commodities, in market, do not furnish a fair compensation to the producers; and, that the cause of this depression of prices is the limited demand, both at home and abroad, which, when fully supplied, leaves a great surplus on our hands. Now, if the *labor* of a country be the source of its wealth; and if that labor has been employed in producing a surplus which is without value; then has the country sustained an injury, by an unwise direction of its labor.

The great body of your memorialists are farmers. From the beginning of the separate, independent existence of this nation, until within a few years past, the condition of Europe was such, that the products of the land of this country found a ready market, and lucrative prices. During the long and wasting wars in that part of the world, the nations there had so large a portion of their population transformed from producers into consumers, that, after consuming the products of their own soil, they still required additional supplies, so extensive as to consume, also, the surplus products of American agriculture. The population of our country, moreover, was at that time thin; land was cheap; the augmenting numbers of the people found ample room, and easily spread over the surface of the territory; the new soil was fertile; little skill was requisite; and health, and robust habits, were nearly all the capital that was needed. The nation was, at the same time, neutral; and our merchants had full employment as carriers. In such a state of things, the labor of this country was profitably employed, in two principal ways; and, in those two ways, that labor was sufficient to produce a degree of general prosperity never exceeded.

But that state of things has passed away. The general settlement of the affairs of Europe, by the peace of 1815, re-converted the nations there from consumers into producers.

The vast amount of labor disengaged from the operations of war, and directed to the cultivation of the land, together with the cheapness of that labor, and the skill with which it was directed, produced such an abundance of supply as to drive our productions out of their markets, and, in some instances, to follow them to our own shores. There is, therefore, at this time, and there has been for several years, an over-supply of the products of agriculture—they have glutted the markets of the world. This want of a foreign market has not been supplied at home; for our own producers have increased in a far greater ratio than our consumers; and the consequences have been, in this part of the country, a universal depression of prices, depreciation of the value of land, a sluggish circulation, general embarrassment, frequent sheriffs' sales, and ruin. These ill consequences, though experienced most extensively by our farmers, have not been confined to them. They have been felt by the mechanics, the laborers, the merchants, and the professional men. Farmers could not afford to hire laborers, to produce what could not be sold; and neither could afford to buy of the merchant, commodities for which he could not pay. The spirit of enterprise was checked. No new houses and barns, and no new implements of tillage, were wanted. There were already more than enough of these: for, nothing could be done with them, except to produce, and to shelter, what had lost its value. New lands, to a great degree, ceased to be cleared; new contracts ceased to be made; and, from this general inaction, the mechanic lost his wages, and the professional man his fees. Such is, and has for some time been, the general situation of these northern and eastern states.

Now, the mode of removing these burdensome effects, to your memorialists appears perfectly plain. The condition of things among us calls for the introduction, and permanent establishment, of new departments of labor, in order to complete the organization of the social state, and open to the career of an ingenious people new objects of enterprise; new subjects for the beneficial exercise of their faculties, and employment of their means. In short, a *manufacturing population* is needed. A portion of the community, now engaged in producing, or to be so engaged as time advances, must be converted, exclusively, into fabricators and consumers, or the country will be overwhelmed with an enormous mass of surplus, which it cannot throw off, and become palsied from a stagnant circulation. Human industry is naturally distributed, with the advancement of society, into certain great departments of labor; and such distribution cannot be long prevented, without essentially retarding that advancement. The ultimate, permanent order of nature is, the productions of the earth, "all-bearing mother," first; next, the modification of those productions, in such forms as may best adapt them to use and enjoyment; and, last, mutual exchanges of all. Connected with these great departments of industry, and dependant upon them, are the mechanical and professional occupations. In this country, owing to circumstances in the situation of the world already suggest-

ed, we have hitherto disregarded this order; and, for a time, we found benefit in merely producing and exchanging. But the time has at last come—and it is indicated by the general cry for help, now rising from the great majority of those who are engaged in both these departments of industry—for the establishment of the other, completion of the machinery of society.

Your memorialists are aware, that the main difficulty in the way of doing this, are the prejudices, the habits of thinking and acting, which originated in the period of our history already referred to. The opinions then adopted, and which were then proper, have been reluctant to yield to the evidence, that those times have forever passed away. But that evidence has now so accumulated, that the most slow of faith begin to believe, that a new distribution of the labor of the country must be made, or the prosperity of the country must be seriously impaired.

These truths are so plain—they have been forced upon your memorialists by such impressive experience—that your memorialists cannot but believe, that your Honorable Body will listen, examine, and be convinced. This request of your memorialists is not the sinister prayer of a few individuals, nor of a small and distinct class, having only a petty stake in society; it is the united voice of the mass of the people, in all the callings of life; and it is occasioned by a community of embarrassment never known among us, till the nations of Europe quitted war for work, and left us without a market.

A market, therefore, is our great want. How is this to be obtained? In the opinion of your memorialists, it is to be obtained only by such an increase of duties on the importation of those foreign fabrics, of which the raw material is, or can be, easily and abundantly produced at home, as will encourage a diversion of a part of our own capital and labor to the manufacture of them. The old doctrine is, we are aware, that no nation is ready to manufacture until its population has so multiplied, that there are more hands than lands. But this is fallacious. The true test of the fact, whether a nation be ready to manufacture, is not drawn from the comparison of the number of its people with the quantity of its land; but from the comparison of its ability to produce, with its opportunity to sell: or, in other words, the true test is, the relation of demand and supply. It may, indeed, happen, that, while there are fewer hands than lands, the cultivation of the latter will be the most beneficial appropriation of a nation's labor; but it may, also, be otherwise; so that the first mentioned comparison does not furnish the true criterion, and the example of our own country has now demonstrated both parts of this proposition. At first, our ability to supply was not as great as our opportunity to sell; and all that we could produce found a profitable market. Now, we cannot dispose of half that we can supply; and a general agricultural langour pervades the country. But to restore the country from this universal inanition, by the introduction of manufactures, requires the interposition of the legislative power of the nation. This interposition is necessary, because, without protecting



duties, the manufacturers of Europe, with their enormous capital and exquisite skill, can manufacture so economically as to defeat our infant attempts, by their competition. They can, and do throw such quantities of their fabrics into our markets, and force them upon us at such low prices, that our smaller capitalists, with their less skillful artisans, cannot establish their factories, and save themselves from ruin. This competition can never be sustained without protecting duties in the outset, nor until experience and skill shall have introduced economy, and the business of manufacturing shall have become so extensive, that small profits shall make large amounts: because, no prudent man will hazard his property, under existing circumstances, in a contest with those who can wield means so much more extensive. Even if our domestic attempts should be made, in the beginning, with some prospect of success, yet they would soon be borne down by the foreign manufacturers: for, such is the state of society in the great manufacturing countries of Europe, every department of industry is so crowded, so much capital is invested in each, and the obstacles to a different investment are so insurmountable, that the manufacturer must continue to manufacture, at the most penurious prices, or go to ruin; for he cannot change his occupation, when every other department of labor is as much crowded as his own.

This state of things is necessarily growing worse, because the ability to manufacture is increasing in Europe in a far greater ratio than the demand for consumption, in consequence of the improvement and multiplication of machinery. It is, therefore, the interest of those manufacturers to sell at the lowest possible rates, and force their goods off, for the purpose of preventing competition, in every direction, though, at the same time, they cannot consume the tithe of the products which are supplied. The consequences of this state of things are, poverty among the agricultural nations, and wealth and power among the manufacturing ones. If our manufacturers could be protected from this overbearing competition, until they should have acquired experience and skill sufficient for economy, they could then sustain the competition from abroad; and the competition at home would fast reduce prices to their present general standard, or lower. It is urged, we know, by those who oppose our views, that it is unjust to raise prices upon the majority of the community, by diminishing competition, through the medium of protecting duties, or in any other way, for the benefit of a small class. But this objection is deceptive and unsound. In the first place, though apparently true in terms, it is, nevertheless, substantially false. The great body of your memorialists, as has already been stated, are farmers; and, though the immediate benefit of the permanent and effectual protection of manufactures would be felt by those who are engaged in manufacturing, yet the ultimate, and by far the most important, benefit, would be experienced by society at large; and it is precisely for the sake of the latter that we ask protection for the former. It is, moreover, a fact, which cannot be questioned, that the low prices which at present form the great obstacle in the way of our domestic manufacturers are, in a great

degree, caused by even the unskilful and hazardous attempts of those very manufacturers, with the present protection, to supply their countrymen; and we would seriously ask, if they are not entitled to some consideration on that account? Take away this domestic attempt to manufacture; let foreign manufacturers know that there was no design in this country to engage in such business; and soon would the prices of imported goods rise to such a height, as would be an ample remuneration to our manufacturers, if they could now receive them; because, the charges on foreign goods, for transportation, first of the raw material, then of the manufactured article, with a great variety of incidental charges, would be saved to our own manufacturers, and, consequently, to our consumers. But allow that prices would be raised; it would only be for a short time. Our artisans would soon acquire skill enough to reduce the expense of fabrication; and the adoption of those economical modes of conducting the business, which experience would suggest, and to which domestic competition would urge our proprietors, would soon bring down prices; and the consumer would shortly be as cheaply supplied as he now is, with incalculable advantage of a permanent, steady, and increasing market open for his raw materials, his provisions, and his bread-stuffs. Besides, if the prices paid to manufacturers were raised, so would be the prices paid to the farmers, and the mechanics, and all others; and high prices both for buying and selling, are better than low prices, even if the same relative proportion obtains in the respective cases.

But, on this subject, we are not left merely to general reasoning; nor to the unsupported assertions of interested individuals. The experience of the country, in this respect, though not extensive, is perfectly decisive. In 1816, the *minimum* price, upon which duty should be charged, of a square yard of white cotton cloth, was fixed at 25 cents. The wholesome effects of this wise measure, which were, the investment of capital, the production of skill, and the excitement of competition in the manufacture, are too well known to need elucidation. Every man's experience has informed him, that the coarse cottons now manufactured in this country, are both superior in quality, and inferior in price, to any similar article ever imported. The benefit of this result has been most extensively experienced by the grower of the raw material: for, while he has enlarged his market for his cotton, he has been able to procure a better and cheaper article for consumption. The extent of this benefit to the southern cotton planter may be illustrated by the fact, that, whereas, in 1810, there were purchased and wrought, in our northern factories, only about 3,000,000 pounds of raw cotton, there are now purchased, and manufactured, not far from 30,000,000 pounds, or about one quarter of all the cotton produced in the country.

Now, confiding in experience as the great trier of truth, and impelled by the general depression of the agricultural, and, by necessary consequence, of all the other interests of the north, we ask, first, for an increase of duty on the importation of *woollen fabrics*.

All this northern section of the Union, especially the state of New York, is peculiarly well adapted, by nature, to the raising of sheep. Wool is a raw material that can here be supplied in abundance, and with ease; but there are none to buy it. We wish the establishment of woollen factories, so that we can convert some of our arable into pasture, and diminish the surplus of our bread-stuffs and provisions; sell that diminished surplus for more than the whole original quantity would bring; and, by gradually raising up a body of consumers, in the shape of a manufacturing population, sell to those consumers an article that will bring us profit; that will furnish our countrymen, as well as ourselves, with cheaper and better clothing than they can now procure, and set all classes of society prosperously at work again. To do this, we respectfully ask the duty on imported woollen fabrics to be raised fifty per centum; and that a *minimum* price, on which duty shall be charged, be fixed at from eighty to an hundred and twenty cents for the square yard of woollen cloth. Upon similar principles, and relying upon experience for our guide, we also ask an increase of duty on imported iron. There are beds of iron ore, distributed in various parts of these northern and middle states, sufficiently extensive to supply all nations, and the ore is surpassed, in richness and quality, by none in the world. These ore-beds are found, for the most part, in hilly and mountainous regions, of little or no value for agricultural purposes, but abounding with fuel, and with water. Nature is waiting for us, the wants of the community are urging us, to appropriate these copious sources of wealth and strength to the public welfare. But here, again, as in the case of wool, foreign competition prevents the extension of those establishments, which would convert our vast bodies of ore, now wholly without value, into riches. Next to wool in importance, in this connexion, and in this part of the country, is iron. Besides its essential use, as the great weapon of national defence, it is the great instrument of peaceful industry; and it is passing into use in many new forms. The improved ploughs, for example, are almost wholly made of iron; and this use of the metal has enhanced its importance to agriculture in an incalculable ratio. Though the first effect of protection in this case, as in others, would probably be an augmentation of the nominal price, yet the next and speedy effect would be, beyond a doubt, the reduction of that price to, at least, its present *minimum* amount, by the operation of competition and skill at home. Indeed, such is the abundance of our ore, and the natural facilities of the country for smelting and manufacturing it, that it would be reasonable to expect that an article, of which the transportation forms so large a part of its cost to the consumer, would soon be afforded, if manufactured at home, lower than foreign iron, and, at the same time, bring a lucrative compensation to the manufacturer. Besides its direct importance to agriculture, and to the various mechanical and household uses to which iron is appropriated, the increased production of it among us would essentially benefit the community, through the medium of the woollen and cotton factories.



The iron machinery of such establishments constitutes a large part of their expense, by diminishing the amount of which, the fabrics therein made could, plainly, be afforded at cheaper rates to the consumer. On imported bar-iron, therefore, we ask an increase of duty of ten dollars per ton; and such additional duty upon other heavy articles manufactured of iron, as shall furnish an equally effectual protection to the manufacturer of them at home.

The article of tallow, too, is one in which our farmers have an extensive interest. The average importation of tallow, for the three years ending with 1822, was upwards of 4,000,000 pounds. This was equal to the tallow produced by somewhat more than 80,000 head of cattle, averaging 50 pounds of tallow each. Thus, in pursuance of the policy, which, under pretence of avoiding monopolies, of not conferring peculiar privileges on one class, of protecting agriculture, rather than manufactures, the farmers of the United States, with lands beyond their utmost ability to till profitably, have been purchasing pasture and corn abroad, for more than 80,000 head of cattle, and then buying the tallow which all those cattle could produce. Is it wise thus to pay to foreign graziers the money which should go to our own farmers? or should we thus encourage foreign industry, when our own is suffering?

Having experienced the good effects of protecting duties in the manufacture of coarse cotton fabrics, your memorialists believe the time has arrived for some additional duty on foreign cottons, so as to encourage the manufacture, at home, of the finer fabrics of this material; and, for this purpose, we would suggest, that the *minimum* price, on which duty shall be charged, be fixed at 33 cents for the square yard of cotton cloth. In this connexion, we would also observe, that the printing of cotton goods is becoming an object of importance to the country. The South American market is about to be open to us, and the printed cottons are most valuable in that market. It would, therefore, be wise, in the opinion of your memorialists, to encourage that branch of the business.

Before concluding this application to your honorable body, we would also observe, that, in addition to our conviction of the sound policy of granting further protection to our domestic industry, in the modes above recommended, your memorialists cannot but think we have a strong claim upon the equal justice of your honorable body. The protecting duties hitherto laid by Government, as far as they have been connected with agriculture, have chiefly aided the agriculture of the southern states. That such aid has been extended to our southern brethren is gratifying to us, as members of the same confederacy; but, we think, at the same time, that it fairly authorizes the expectation that a similar paternal policy will be extended to the agriculture of the north.

BETHEL MATHER, *Chairman.*

GEORGE M. TIBBITS, *Secretary.*

